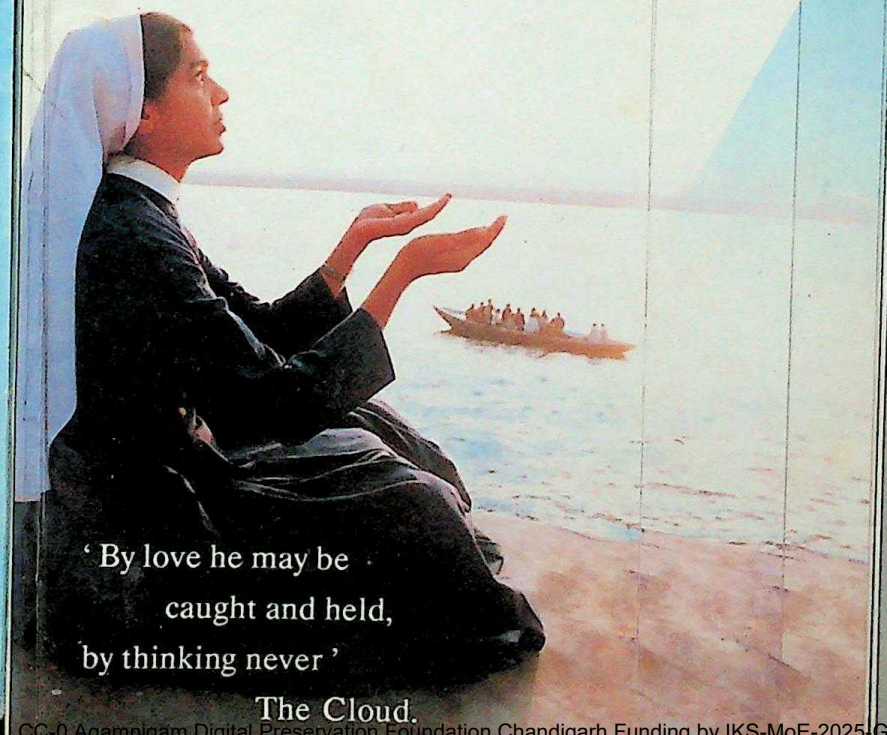
Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Revised Edition

A METHOD OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

By Father Jim Borst, MHM



'By love he may be
caught and held,
by thinking never'
The Cloud.

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A METHOD OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

BY FATHER JIM BORST
Mill Hill Missionary

With a Foreword by
ABHISHIKTANANDA

REVISED EDITION 1992

ASIAN TRADING CORPORATION
P.O. Box No. 11029
BOMBAY - 400 020.

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Imprimatur :

+ Hippolytus Kunnunkal, OFM Cap.
Jammu-Srinagar, 13th August 1991

© Asian Trading—1973.

Twelth Revised Edition — 1992
Thirteenth Edition -- 1993

Layout and Design of Cover :
A. K. Dhar (Varanasi)

Published by M. Pinto, Asian Trading Corporation,
33-A, Marine Lines, Bombay-400 020. Printed by Bro. Richard,
at St. Francis I.T.I. Press, Mt. Poinsur, Borivli, Bombay-400 103.

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FOREWORD

Last year in August, some Franciscan nuns at Indore put into my hands the July (1972) issue of IN CHRISTO and pointed out an unsigned article, entitled a Method of Contemplative Prayer. They were really thrilled with it and wondered whether reprints would be available, so that more people might benefit from it. As I was going through the text, I was strongly reminded of some stencilled papers I had read some months before. Immediately I wrote to Fr. Borst who confirmed my guess and kindly agreed to have the whole thing published eventually in booklet form.

This has now been done and I cannot thank the Lord enough for it. The first merit of the booklet is that it comes from a priest who is deeply involved in the most active ministry. Fr. Borst is not one of those supposedly otherworldly monks who never cease advising others how to pray while they are themselves out of touch with the harsh reality of daily life. People who have visited him bear witness that even apart from his teaching periods, he has apparently not one minute left to himself: from morning to night boys keep on filling his room. Hence, he knows well enough what it means not to have time for prayer, or to be so busy all day long that when one sits or kneels for prayer, one is unable to remain peaceful and quiet. Yet he does find time to pray, and he finds in prayer such a joy and relief that he is eager to share it with others. And so we have here the really practical recommendations he has suggested and the wonderful way in which he leads us step by step, so that no one need go to prayer as to a duty, still less as to a burden, but rather

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one may go as to a longed for meeting with the Lord, in the full joy of the Spirit.

Here indeed lies the whole secret. The only real prayer is the prayer in the Spirit. Fr. Borst, indeed, is known—even more after the recent Seminar on Prayer at Bangalore (March-April 1973) for the interest he takes in what is called the **Catholic Pentecostal Movement,** or also the **Charismatic Renewal Movement,** a spiritual development which is likely to have a strong impact within the Church in the years to come.

Probably quite a few will frown at the word 'pentecostalism.' Yet the day of the first Pentecost was the birthday of the Church. Can we really even forget that the Church was first revealed to the world, and to herself in the effervescence of the Spirit? Do not the Acts and the Epistles record the quite common event of the Spirit falling upon believers? It is true that centuries of worldly involvement have made Christianity seemingly the most reasonable organisation and common-sense way of life, and one really wonders whether any place is left in it for the free display of the Spirit. Perhaps deep within ourselves, we are rather afraid of the Spirit. As it says in the Gospel, nobody ever knows from which direction the Spirit may choose to come upon us, and where he may carry along those who do not resist his impulse. St. Paul reminds us that though the Spirit is one, his manifestations are pluriform and remain a challenge to man's boldest imaginations. He may take a man to such a depth of prayer that he can no longer even utter **'Abba,' Father :** so deeply has he been swallowed up into the abyss of the unnamable mystery.

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Another man, or the same at a different time, he will make dance and jump, sing or cry, oblivious of common-sense or social convention. It is the Spirit who led anchorites to the desert and inspired Francis of Assissi to go to the streets with his companions, singing the glory of the Lord—things still commonly found among Hindu renunciates today, for **the Spirit is One.**

Yet when the Spirit is not given free movement, where is the Church? Where is genuine Christianity? Jesus came to earth to prepare for the Spirit. He even had to go through cross, death and resurrection, for the Spirit to come (Cf. John 16, 7). Having entered the Father's glory, He poured out the Spirit on his disciples—that the same Spirit who was the leading principle of his own life, the same Spirit in whom he experienced his non-duality, his advaita, with the Father.

The true secret of the life of prayer—and this means the whole life of **anyone who is born of God**—is to put oneself completely at the disposal of the Spirit. Too often man has wrongly tried to put limits to God, to confine Him within the boundaries of his thoughts and his reason, both in man's inner dimension and in his external expression. But for all that the impact of Christ's message is shattering both to the world and to its 'wisdom.' Thank God, there are many signs now — and Fr. Borst's publications bear witness to this — that with the spreading of secularism, there is also a renewal of the Spirit's awareness within the Church, and even outside it under different names. And here lies the greatest hope for modern man who so often feels dissatisfied with many things, secular and religious, which come to him through present structures.

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The only preparation for the coming of the Spirit, or in other words, for man's awakening to Him, is to empty the mind from all preconceptions, man-made decisions, reason-based desires. The Spirit is there waiting for the lid to be removed. Let our 'real desire' be so strong that the lid **burst** open spontaneously, and the Spirit obtain in us his full freedom.

Gyansu, 3rd May 1973 **Abhishiktananda**

Note : Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973) was a French Benedictine Monk, Fr. Henri Le Saux. He came to India in 1947, to live out his Benedictine vocation as an Indian sannyasi, seeking a 'Hindu-Christian Meeting Point' in advaitic spirituality.

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PREFACE TO THE 1992 REVISED EDITION

In 1972 Swami Abhishiktananda urged me to publish these notes on contemplative prayer. During his life, he did much to call us back to a contemplative experience of God. It was his wish that these notes should be made available in a handy format to individual religious, priests and laity who are eager to set out on the road where they could meet the Risen Lord.

The first 1973 edition had eleven printings in India, with a dozen editions and translations abroad.

Now, in 1991, I present a Revised Edition. The 'Method' is the same, but I have added several 'phases' (Longing Love; Forgiveness from the Heart; Asking in Faith), an initiation schedule for an eight days' retreat (chapter 10) and some fresh insights (e.g. Prayer of the Heart, the Bhakti Marga in Indian Tradition). The matter has also been re-arranged, and it is hoped that this Revised Edition will prove to be a more useful handbook for all who love God and want to know Him more.

Deciding to pray is the first essential step: a decision to give Him an hour of my daily time faithfully, regardless of the cost. In giving my time, I give my self: in surrender and expectation, I open myself to His presence, His love.

It is clear that obstacles, at times recurring obstacles, need to be removed as they bind my inner self and burden my heart: there will often be the need for a deeper sur-

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render of cares and worry, for acceptance of His loving presence in every circumstance, for repentance and true forgiveness. They are distractions of the heart which cannot be by-passed but need to be worked through in prayer, before a heart, totally free, can stretch out its longings towards Him.

It is also clear that if we want to give God the first priority in our life, we have to resist the temptation to fill our minds with TV, video and other modern distractions, and adopt a disciplined God-oriented life-style: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit and the clean of heart: they shall SEE GOD'.

He calls us: "Come to me: I shall give you living water welling up within your inner self. Come to me: I shall open your eyes to my radiance and loveliness. Come to me: I have a word for you—and, have you ever heard the name I have for you?" (Rev. 2, 17).

Baramulla — Kashmir
August, 5th 1991

Father Jim Borst, MHM

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Part One: THE MEANING AND RELEVANCE OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

CHAPTER 1

LORD, TEACH US 'HOW TO PRAY!'

In India, one is frequently asked by non-Christians, 'How do you pray?' People see our life-long dedication to the service of mankind; they recognise in our celibacy a discipline, disposing us to prayer; they surmise the secret of our strength to be a prayful union with God, the full realisation of His Presence within us, and they are eager to know how we have arrived at this.

Yet the ordinary good priest or religious finds the question hard to deal with. We are not accustomed to reflect on the ways, means and objectives of prayer and on its demands on the one who prays. Most of us have learned the practice of prayer (a) by reciting certain prescribed prayers, such as the Divine Office, the Mass prayers, the rosary; (b) by making half an hour's meditation; and (c) by occasional direct 'private' prayer to God.

It has been held that provided we are faithful to our prayer-routine, we have done our duty. In fact, in the past the main objective of teaching prayer in the seminaries and noviciates seems to have been to initiate people into the prayer-programme expected of priests and religious, and to inculcate a sense of faithful observance of this programme.

The programme included a simple form of meditation or mental prayer. This was practised as part of the daily

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horarium, and such daily practice would help you along the path of prayer through life. Prayer beyond meditation, beyond prayerful reflection and exercises of the imagination and will i.e. contemplative prayer, was hardly ever pointed out as a natural development of one's prayer-life; the impression most often conveyed was that it was beyond the reach and proper ambition of ordinary good priests and religious.

Fr. Sergius Wroblewski, OFM, has recently pointed out certain historical reasons for this shying away from real contemplative prayer in the Church during the last few centuries;(1) the lack of appreciation and actual suspicion of such prayer by most protestant christians; the excesses of late medieval extremists such as the illuminists of Spain(2) the deplorable controversy between Bossuet and the saintly Fenelon in 17th century France. 'Bossuet's victory made contemplative prayer something to be shunned. An irrational horror of Quietism(3) prevailed...No one dared even breathe the name of 'contemplation'.(4) There was a consequent lack of true perspective in the religious life, and in the lives of many priests committed to celibacy.(5)

At the same time Fr. Wroblewski points to the flourishing of genuine contemplative prayer in the Church, especially in the Middle Ages, in the lives of the Saints at all times, and to the rediscovery of this prayer as central to the religious life and to all christian life, in the present century.

In one way or other, this form of true prayer remained alive in the lives of saints and devoted christians. But it

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seems that in our own day and age, the Lord wants to **restore this precious gift to the whole of God's people.**

Father Rene Voillaume, in the tradition of the saintly Charles de Foucauld, encourages the practice of contemplative prayer, in silence and solitude, preferably before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, as the most meaningful part of the life of priests and religious. An experience of contemplative prayer has been recommended as a necessary preparation for those wishing to be ordained to the secular priesthood. Father John Dalrymple, for a decade the Spiritual Director of Drygrange Seminary, Scotland, in making this recommendation, quotes Fr. Henri Godin as saying, 'Let all missionaries who consecrate themselves to christianising the working-world be first of all contemplatives' and Fr. Godin, working among the working-class of Paris, was no starry-eyed visionary.(6) Also the Vatican Council II has urged all religious to combine the apostolate with contemplation: '...as they seek God before all things and only him, the members of each community should combine contemplation with apostolic love.'(7)

But it seems **there is more to come:** the Spirit of God seems to breathe over our modern, spiritually starved and secularised society and bring it to new life, specially through an awakening of young people.

Cardinal Alfrink, addressing the Synod of Bishops at Rome, in November 1971, remarked, "We are yet preoccupied with the harmful effects of the process of secularisation, but already in many countries our young people again find the way to God and to Christ, commit them-

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selves to the betterment of the world and also rediscover the way to contemplation. All this happens quite outside the official structures of the Churches. Should this not bring us to a serious examination of conscience?"

In the west many have taken up Asian forms of prayer (such as Budhist meditation, Zen. Trancendental Meditation. Yoga prayer) which are contemplative in character. In using them, people may lack the spiritual guidance of God's Word in Revelation and focus on other 'names' than Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and pursue other goals than union-in-love with Him. But through them, many sincerely seek inner peace, and a personal awareness of their deeper spiritual identity, in a self-indulgent and materialist society.

In India, true contemplative prayer is an answer to a wide-spread and deep longing for 'God-realisation.' People ask us, 'Have you found God? Have you realised God?' In contemplative prayer, we reach out to Him with a longing love, until He gives us His grace and His Presence ('darshan') in our heart, and we allow Him to grow in us and to fill our whole being.

We may also point to the close connection between contemplation and the Charismatic Renewal Movement: in silent prayer as in a charismatic prayer group, there is a movement towards complete surrender to the Spirit of God in love, peace, joy and thanksgiving. In both forms of contemplative prayer there is also the opening of heart and life to the gifts and fruits of the Spirit of Jesus, who leads us to the Father.(8)

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Foot Notes :

(1) Sergius Wroblewski, OFM, Bonaventurian Theology of Prayer, Franciscan Publications, Pulaski, Wisconsin, USA, 1967, Chapter 1.

(2) The Illuminists held that through contemplation they could in this life attain the beatific vision. Their view derived from a misinterpretation of infused contemplation, in which God gives a direct experience of His presence. Against their view, spiritual writers stress that such an experience while being a wonderful grace, is **not** by itself even a sign of true holiness True holiness which through grace leads to the beatific vision in the light of God's glory is measured more by the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5, 22) and the living out of the commandments (John 15, 19) in daily life On this, cf. Dominic M. Hoffman, OP, The Life Within: The Prayer of Union, New York, 1966, p. 181 Stephen B. Clark, Baptised in the Spirit, Dove Publications. 1970, p. 33-34; and 1 John 3, 2 and 1 Cor. 13, 12.

(3) Quietism. While in contemplative prayer the emotions and the mind and imagination are quietened, the heart and will are actively focussed on the Lord. This is the 'longing love' of which the author of The Cloud of Unknowing speaks.

(4) Cf. Sergius Wroblewski, OFM, o. c. p. 30.

(5) In the religious life, the vows express a dedication to the Lord and His Kingdom which predisposes and leads

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towards a knowledge-in-love of God, experienced in faith. When the corner stone of contemplative prayer is no longer explicitly present in the fabric of the religious life there is a lack of orientation and a distortion of perspective; Love of God, the first commandment, must ever have the first place. In a similar way, celibacy only makes sense, at a personal level, if it includes a sharing in His knowledge and love of His Father.

(6) Fr. John Dalrymple in "The Seminary and Prayer.' The Clergy Review, April 1964 (Ware, U.K.). Father Henri Godin, working under Cardinal Suhard, initiated the apostolate of the 'priest-workers' but he died at an early stage. His book, France Pagan?' made a strong impact at the time.

(7) Perfectae Caritatis 5.

(8) Cf. Simon Tugwell, OP, in several articles in the New Blackfriars (Cambridge) in 1969-1971. These articles have been published in book-form: 'Did you Receive the Spirit?' (1972).

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CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER?

To grasp the meaning of contemplative prayer needs some careful thought. Let us first look at the three classical stages of prayer.

First, there is VOCAL PRAYER: a prayer of the lips, with stress on words, recited or sung. The text is often prefabricated or ready-made and is often beautiful and inspiring. There is also spontaneous vocal prayer.

Then, there is MEDITATIVE PRAYER or meditation: a prayer centered in the mind, which pictures and ponders, reflects and thinks of God and His wonderful dealings. The mind seeks understanding and insight. In meditation, the lips are quiet and the mind is active.

Finally, there is CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER or contemplation: a prayer of the heart and will which reach out to God's presence. The lips and mind both come to rest: there is a simple gazing (looking) at the Lord while the heart reaches out in wordless prayer and the will seeks to be one with His.

Contemplation is 'the awareness of God, known and loved at the core of one's being.'(1) When we seek this awareness and find it in faith, we speak of acquired contemplation, when He gives us this awareness in real experience, we speak of infused contemplation.

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Contemplative prayer, then, has two stages, viz.

(a) *acquired contemplation*, when, in faith, hope and with a longing love we reach out to His presence. It begins from a knowing in faith that He is really present, and a seeking with all our heart to touch Him and to be touched by Him.

(b) *infused contemplation* when through His grace, as a free gift, He gives us a real awareness of His presence, e.g. through experiencing the fruits of the holy Spirit: love, joy, peace.(2) Through an awareness of His presence in our heart, or in other ways.

I used to wonder whether infused contemplation was only for some gifted individuals, or for every one. I found the answer in the words of Jesus, 'Keep on asking, and you will receive; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking: the door will be opened to you'.(3) With this answer and promise, I felt it was also for me 'Strong is His love for us' He is faithful forever'.(4)

It is Prayer of the Heart

How many hearts do you have? How persons will think at first only of their one *physical heart*, situated left of centre in the chest; a vital organ, a body centre for blood circulation. Yet each human being has also a *spiritual heart* which is a centre of self-identity, of the spiritual dimension of our being. We spontaneously localise this spiritual heart at the centre of our chest at the lower end of the chest-bone.

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We point to it when we refer to ourselves: 'I myself', 'It is I'. We refer to it when we speak of the 'core of my being', 'the bottom of my heart'. 'My deepest self', and in the Indian tradition, the 'cave (guha) of the heart.' We refer to it when we pray 'Come into my heart, Lord Jesus' and when we receive the Risen Lord as the Bread of Life in the holy Eucharist: He dwells in me (i.e. in my heart) and I dwell in Him (i.e. in His Heart).([5]) We may have noticed that most pictures of the Heart of Jesus correctly positions His Heart at the centre of His chest: it symbolises His spiritual Heart, His inner being, His inner Self.

Most persons are only vaguely aware of their spiritual heart. They may experience it only as a centre of emotions: Love, joy, sorrow, cancer, peace, fear, loneliness, pain. But this heart has deeper layers of self-awareness which can be opened to others, especially to the Lord. Our inner heart, being spiritual, can expand to embrace every one, the whole world. Our heart has been created to become His dwelling-place. In the deepest depth of our heart is the image and likeness of God, my true identity as His true son or daughter. Here He dwells by grace as the source of the spring of living water, as the source of true love, flowing through our hearts.

To come back to contemplative prayer, if you compare it to VOCAL prayer, you could say that in contemplative prayer you seek an awareness that what is contained in the words, is really and truly present to you. 'Our Father in heaven'!: we go beyond the words to an awareness of His presence to us, deep within us, and we dwell in that presence. The actual words used serve as the ringing of a bell, awakening us from sleep to consciousness of His presence within.([6])

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If you compare it to MEDITATIVE Prayer, you could say that instead of running over the Truth reflectively, you come to a halt and gaze at it, awakening to His presence within. Meditation could be compared to the activity that goes into making and painting a picture. Contemplative prayer is then the quiet looking at the completed picture, seeing it as a whole, becoming aware of the reality of the artist's vision which it portrays.(7)

Beyond symbols (words, thoughts, concepts) one seeks to enter a reality which is spiritual and true, enduring, overpowering: God Himself, our Father, Jesus his Beloved Son, and their Spirit. As this reality is beyond the compass of clear concepts, beyond description, our mind cannot see or grasp it, but love can discern it and the Spirit awakens this love and surrender. The author of the Cloud of Unknowing says, therefore, 'He may well be loved, but not thought. By love may He be gotten and holden; but by thought never.(8) The Lord may graciously return this love, and so St. John of the Cross can say, 'Contemplation is nothing else but a secret, peaceful infusion of God, which, if admitted, will set the soul on fire with the Spirit of love.'

Contemplative prayer is the only REAL prayer, in the sense that it leads beyond words (vocal prayer) and thoughts (meditative prayer) the reality towards which words and thought point. In this sense, ALL prayer must have a **real** or **contemplative quality**, because vocal prayer may never be just recitation of words and meditative prayer never just an exercise in thinking.

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Now, the reality we seek is **spiritual reality,** a reality of our own spirit, but pre-eminently the reality of the Spirit of God. **Contemplative** prayer may be called 'real' prayer, and **'spiritual'** prayer, in the sense of opening us to the Holy Spirit, to His action, to His gifts, or 'opening ourselves unreservedly to the cleansing and healing of our spirit by the Holy Spirit, in an awareness of His presence.'

It is at this point that we see the reason why **Contemplative** prayer may also be called **pentecostal** prayer (and vice versa)—in the sense that through this prayer we seek an awareness of the Indwelling Spirit, given by Jesus as our Comforter. Who will be with us forever,(°) and Who will supply us with all the spiritual gifts we need.

Mature and adult christians are meant to reach the stage of Contemplative Prayer. The three stages could be compared to stages of schooling. One begins in the Primary School with reading and writing (vocal prayer), the Middle School of prayer is meditation, where reflection on life and revelation is the main subject, although vocal prayer is not neglected. The High School of prayer is the beginning of contemplative prayer which we are recommending. One does not forget or neglect what one has learned at the Primary and Middle School, but the growing point of our prayer life is an awakening to God's presence and an opening to His Spirit. (The higher mystical states are of course, way ahead in the M.A. and Ph.D. classes !!).

In all this, we can only point to the Mountain of the Lord. Each must begin his pilgrimage on his own two feet. There are maps and guides. Do not fail to ask people

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you meet on the way but it is the breath of the Spirit that carries you forward and upwards; it is the Glory of the Lord dimly seen or guessed at the end, that draws you onwards...And do not forget to consult the guidebooks at times.

In the Carmelite tradition, the first stage of this prayer is referred to as 'acquired contemplation', i.e. contemplative prayer accessible to any good man who strives, with the grace of God. St. Theresa of Avila calls it the 'prayer of recollection.'(10) Bossuet seems to have popularised the name 'prayer of simplicity' which has been adopted by A. Tanquerey.(11) And there are other names, equally expressive, such as 'prayer of silence', 'prayer of repose,' 'prayer of the simple presence of God,' 'prayer of loving attention' and 'prayer of the heart.(12)

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Foot Notes:

(1) Clifton Wolters in his introduction to his translation into modern English of The Cloud of Unknowing, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 36.

(2) Gal. 5, 22.

(3) Luke 11, 5-13.

(4) Ps. 117, 2 (numbering from the Greek Septuagint, as used in the Liturgy).

(5) John 6, 58.

(6) Cf. Abhishiktananda, 'Prayer', ISPCK, 1972.

(7) Father Rene Voillaume describes this prayer as 'looking at God while loving Him.' Cf. also Dom Vitalis Lehodey, OCR, 'We look because we love, we look in order to love, and our love is fed and inflamed by 'looking.' (The Ways of Mental Prayer, Gill, Dublin, 1960, pt. II Ch. ix, par. 2) and Cardinal Lercaro who attempts a definition 'Contemplative Prayers is an elevation of the soul to God through a simple and highly effective intuition.' ('Methods of Mental Prayer,' London, Burns & Oates, 1957, Ch. 14).

(8) 'The Cloud of Unknowing' a medieval, contemplative treatise (about 1350), Penguin Classics, 1961, Ch. 6.

(9) John 14, 16.

(10) The Way of Perfection, Ch. 28.

(11) A. Tanquerey, The Spiritual Life, par. 1363 ff.

(12) Cardinal Lercaro, Methods of Mental Prayer. London, Burns & Oates, 1957. Ch. 14.

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CHAPTER 3

SOME FRUITS AND BENEFITS OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

My experience is that the fruits and benefits of a daily discipline of contemplative prayer are given, not so much during the time of prayer, but rather outside it: the prayer affects the quality of your life.

During the time of prayer, I may often have a sense of wasting my time of mental distraction, of sleepiness. Yet the seeking of my heart and my will for Him, and the graceful effects of His real Presence to me, ground me deeper into Him.

Outside my time of prayer, however so poor, I find that I remember His presence spontaneously from time to time. It may be a moment when I thank Him, or when I tell Him 'I love You'. Also, there is a deeper peace in me; I can work better and cope better with people and things; and I am more eager to serve Him and to do only what He asks of me. What counts is not what pleases me, but what He asks of me.

In the long run, this daily prayer has a transforming effect on my whole life:

(1) It leads to a Transformation of our Personality

Slowly but surely, contemplative prayer will lead to a wonderful transformation of the human person. It is clear

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that our spirituality and our prayer must be 'effective' in changing us; else it will be irrelevant and a scandal. You cannot 'pray' day after day, month after month, and remain the same. If you do, your seeking and prayer is not genuine but a subtle way of hiding yourself from the living God, a subtle way of keeping the Spirit from intruding into your life. But real, contemplative prayer involves an opening to the Spirit. His gifts and His fruits(1) will be more and more evident. Through this prayer we more and more experience Jesus' personal gift to each of us: His peace.(2) We are 'healed' daily in the living water of His Spirit, and grow towards the full stature of the manhood of our Saviour.

The author of The Cloud of Unknowing, a medieval treatise on contemplation, described this transformation in a delightful manner:

'All those who engage in this work of contemplation find that it has a good effect on the body as well as on the soul, for it makes them attractive in the eyes of all who see them. So much so that the ugliest person alive who becomes, by grace, a contemplative finds that he suddenly (and again by grace) is different, and that every good man he sees is glad and happy to have his friendship, and is spiritually refreshed, and helped nearer God by his company.

Therefore, seek to get this gift by grace; for whoever really has it will be well able to control both himself and his possessions by virtue of it. It gives him discernment, when he needs it, to read people's needs and characters. It gives him a knack of being at home with every one he

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talks to, habitual sinner or not, without sinning himself... to the astonishment of the onlooker, and with a magnetic effect on others, drawing them by grace to the same spiritual work that he practices. His face and his words are full of spiritual wisdom, fervent and fruitful, assured and free from falsehood, far from feigned and affected 'hypocrites.' For there are those who concentrate all their energies on learning how to speak weightily and to avoid making fools of themselves, with many humble-beats and displays of devotion...(3)

Then he goes on to paint a painfully true picture of the person who pretends to this transformation, but who does not pray...

The point surely is that a man who has learned to be relaxed, outgoing and at ease with God, is the same with other people; and that whereas nervous and irritable ('angry') people are most unpleasant company, we love to see and meet a person who radiates peace and strength, whose sympathy is positive and outgoing and who, moreover, is aware of my 'needs and character'.

St. Theresa of Avila contributes her own testimony to the 'effectiveness' of contemplative prayer; 'If you will try and live in the presence of God for one year, you will see yourself at the end of it at the height of perfection without your even knowing it.'

The following witness of our own times is more modest, yet equally positive:

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'After less than two years serious effort in contemplative prayer, I recognise, the following changes have taken place within me:

Joy, peace, calm, where before there was fear, tension, unrest of all kinds. Even in difficult situations and decisions, peace remains and solutions are brought about in most unexpected ways—not my own wisdom, for I just don't see, but they happen.

Growing convictions of the reality that is God and of His Spirit. Glimpses of the Fatherhood of God, the sense of personal dignity and worth because of His personal love for me—replace former self-hatred and negativism.

Acceptance of my work, its unpleasant duties, of criticism in peace and a more loving surrender. More tolerance and acceptance of others with less irritability. Given my proud temperament and nature, I see through His mercy that I have been prevented from many tragedies. There is a gradual discovery of the false self-idol, a desire for TRUTH. Many Psychological ills come to light, making me more free.

There is a greater appreciation of GIFT of vocation—more stability and genuineness in striving to live it. Other prayers and devotions are more meaningful. Desire for God has grown. This gives me more courage in the striving—formely I was much given to despondency and self-pity.

I think it is true that Faith, Hope and Love have been deepened. I long to share this treasure."

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(2) Through it You Become more True to Yourself

Another wholesome 'effect' or fruit of this prayer is that, through the action of the Holy Spirit, we become more fully and more truly human.

Before God, in His presence, we learn the necessity of being absolutely true to ourselves. We learn to see ourselves as we truly are, behind the mask of conventions, our poses and pretensions, our small and big deceptions. Gradually outgrowing artificiality in thought, word and deed, false attitudes, our false self we grow in truthfulness and genuineness. We become more truly ourselves, the more we are and live in God's Presence.

As we become more true to ourselves, because more true to God, we shall also be more true to our surroundings (e.g. more objective in our search for knowledge and in our evaluation of information) and more true to the people we live with. Our capacity for genuine interpersonal relationship will increase. True charity (in the sense of ability to enter sympathetically into other people's feelings, situations, needs) goes together with true prayer: the ability to be open and true to God and ourselves. How true the words of St. John: He who says that he knows God and hates his brother is a liar!

Sebastian Temple([4]) expresses something similar in his song of the Happy Man:

Happy the man who wanders with the Lord: Happy the man who knows how to live. Happy the man who

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never seeks reward : giving because he loves to give...He seeks no gold, he wants no gain; he knows these things are all in vain. He needs no praise, nor honour too : His only motto : **To your own self be true. Happy the man who learned how to pray.** Happy the man who has a burning goal. Happy the man whose service needs no pay : **This man has found his own soul.** Happy the man, happy the man of the Lord ! !

(3) Effect on our Prayer Life

The main effect on other prayers is to bring new meaning and sense of unity to other prayers. One moves away from a routine saying of prayers according to a prescribed programme. One feels the need, and one gradually obtains the ability of giving all prayers a 'contemplative' quality, i.e., one makes them into real prayer, and does not just recite or sing them.

Initially, it may well be that one feels the need for **a reduction** of set vocal prayers, and avoidance of repetition; one feels an inability to accept as normal, prayer that is hurried or said slovenly, without due reverence, or regard to its sense. But later on, gradually one may well be moved to return to more vocal prayer, especially of the repetitive kind (e.g. the private Rosary; ejaculatory prayers, the Jesus Prayer, and so on) because it helps us dwell in the presence of God and to 'wander with him'.

The Second Vatican Council also pointed to the benefit to be derived for the Mass and Breviary prayers from a practice of mental prayer :

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'In order that religious may share more intimately and with greater profit in the holy mystery of the Eucharist, and in the public prayer of the Church, and that their interior life be more abundantly nourished, **priority should be given to mental prayer over a multiplicity of other** prayers. However, those community exercises which are traditional in the Church should be preserved and care taken that religious be rightly instructed in the ways of the religious life.'([5])

Surely, holy Mother Church, in shortening and simplifying the prayers of the Office and the Mass, wishes us to achieve two objectives, viz. (a) to make them into real and meaningful prayers; (b) to give a little more time for personal contemplative prayer.

(4) Becoming a 'God-realised' Person

In the Indian religious context, we can say that a daily discipline of contemplative prayer leads us to 'God-realisation', i.e. as we seek His 'darshan' (holy Presence) single-mindedly, we shall come to experience His presence in our heart. We shall **know** Him, be filled with Him, and become more and more one with Him.

Foot Notes :

(1) Galatians 5, 22.

(2) John 14, 27.

(3) The Cloud of Unknowing Chapter 54. St. John of the Cross also taught that 'a deep life of prayer in

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the Spirit comes more quickly to those who are given to solitary prayer.'

(4) 'A tall, blonde, happy Catholic, eager to share his love of God. In his own search for truth, he practised Yoga for 17 years and was a Hindu monk in India for two years. Not satisfied he considered embracing Judaism, but instead found in the Catholic Church what he has been searching for. His newly released albums are 'And the Waters keep on running' and God is a fire of Love.' (The Examiner, Bombay, June 19, 1971, p. 400.)

(5) Ecclesiae Sanctac 21.

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CHAPTER 4

CHRISTIAN PRAYER AND THE PRAYER OF INDIA

At times the impression is given that contemplative prayer does not belong to the Gospel of Christ, and is at best a discipline taken by the Church from other religions and adapted to the Christian life. Undoubtedly there have been many people outside the Christian tradition who have eagerly sought and found God in prayer. But a careful study of the Gospels and of the Christian traditions reveals that contemplative prayer is at the heart of the Gospel and of the Christian life. It was the prayer of the prophets and the humble of the Old Testament, of those who seeking the Face of the Lord endeavoured to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their strength(1) and worship Him in the contemplative peace and Rest of the Sabbath.

It is also the prayer of Jesus, of Mary and of the saints. A study of the lives of almost all holy people will bring this prayer to light as the heart of their discipleship and their Christian lives.

IT IS THE PRAYER OF JESUS

Jesus experienced His oneness with God also in and through His human nature, which is in every way like our own 'He took to himself descent from Abraham. It was essential that He should in this way become completely like his brothers so that He could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God's religion, able to atone for

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human sins. That is, because He has himself been through temptation. He is able to help others who are tempted.'(2)

We see how He sought to live in conditions (of solitude, privacy, silence, fasting, watching in prayer) which render human nature more open to the Spirit, better instruments of prayer, better instruments of an experience of union in knowledge and love, with His Father. It was in such silent prayer that He learned to know His Father's Will and that He experienced complete surrender in prayer He heard the Word His Father speaks,(3) and in prayer He knew His Father in love.(4)

By sharing His Spirit of love and surrender with His disciples, He gave them a share in His union with His Father.(5) In this way we have become adopted sons and daughters, sharing by grace what Jesus, our Brother, is in His very being. 'And if we are sons, we are heirs as well: heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, sharing His sufferings so as to share His glory.'(6)

Jesus, then, wants us to share in His own experience (in His human nature) of kinship of the Father in the love of the Spirit.(7) In Contemplative Prayer, we are led to re-create the prayer-experience of our Lord, though in a very imperfect and faltering manner, to be made complete in the light of His glory.(8)

IT IS THE PRAYER OF MARY

There is a very significant clue to the understanding of Mary's spiritual life. It is her strange decision not to marry, a decision made before the Annunciation(9) in the

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face of Jewish tradition and of public opinion against the unmarried state.(10) This decision points to the unique grace that filled her from the beginning. From very young she must have opened herself to an awareness of God, and she must have experienced the joy of living before His Face, the joy of being blessed with His smile.(11) Instinctively she shied away from sin and evil, as casting to shadow over that relation, as tending to close her person to the Lord.

In her heart lived the grace of the 'anawim', the humble of heart, the poor of the Lord who single-mindedly seeks His Face and praise His Name, and whose spirituality is so admirably expressed in Psalm 33.

> 'Glorify the Lord with me: together let us praise His name!
> I sought the Lord and He answered me:
> look towards Him and be radiant!
> Taste and see the Lord is good
> Seek and strive after peace!
> Those who hide in Him shall not be condemned.'

Instinctively, she was drawn to a way of life that would keep her free for the Lord, not merely in outward service, but in inward service of praise and thanksgiving. She saw herself as the Lord's Handmaid, single-mindedly attentive to His Presence. If the Lord was going to bring salvation to His People through a poor and humble Servant of the Lord,(12) 'my chosen one, in whom my soul delights,'(13) then she would be a poor and humble servant of the Lord, His handmaid expressing in her whole of life a bridal love and faithfulness which Israel as a people so conspicuously lacked.(14)

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Thus, she felt called to a decision, if not to a vow, not to marry, a decision which involved complete surrender in faith to His guidance, and He led her to a young man Joseph, gifted with a similar grace...

She was a thoughtful person,(15) treasuring the traditional poetic prayer-songs (psalms) and the Lord's messages through the prophets. She had the contemplative's feelings for lanugage, and when inspired, would express her own prayer in traditional song.(16)

She must have initiated Jesus into the Jewish ways of prayer. She—the mother of Jesus, the Teacher of prayer, and an aunt of the hermit-like prophet John the Baptist—she must have spent must time quietly in prayer and contemplation. The last time we find her mentioned in Scripture, we find her in continuous prayer, with the disciples, pleading for the outpouring of the Spirit which her Son had promised.(17)

We may surely think of Mary as the 'Contemplative Rose' or the 'Mystical Rose', i.e. as the 'Rose of Sharon'(18) symbolising the beauty of a woman deeply loved and deeply in love, longing for His presence and for union with Him, spreading fragrance with the freshness of spring.(19)

IT IS THE PRAYER OF INDIA

Whereas in the West, the hunger of the human heart for God is being stifled and smothered in a materialist and non-religious society, in Asian countries people have remained deeply religious. In many different ways, there is a reaching out to the divine, to God. There is great spiritual hunger.

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In his book 'The Open Door' Fr. Hans Staffner S.J.([20]) observes that Indian religions have roots in agnostic (Budhist, Jain) and in panteistic-polytheistic (Hindu) philosophies. Yet, over the centuries, there seems to have been a gradual evolution towards 'theistic' religion, where salvation, peace and self-realisation are being received through a loving union with God. Indian traditions speaks of the 'bhakti marga' i.e. a total surrender to God in faith, trust and loving devotion as the way to union with God which brings bliss and salvation.

This 'bhakti' religion finds its full perfection and flowering in God's revelation through Jesus and the gift of His Spirit : Love of God our Father with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and love and compassion for our fellow human beings.([21])

Prayer in the 'bhakti' tradition is a contemplative longing for the manifestation of God's Presence, and our union with Him by His indwelling presence in our hearts. This tradition also uses the continually repeated invocation of His Name ('Nam-Jap') as a principal aid in prayer.

Such 'bhakti' prayer differs from other forms of prayer which may primarily seek self-awareness and self-realisation, as in forms of Budhist, Transcendental and Yogic Meditation.

The contemplative movement in Islam, called Sufism, generally has a clear focus on Almighty God as the object of our longing, our seeking and finding. Sufism also uses a form of repetition of His Name as an aid to prayer ('dhikr' or remembering Him by repeating His Name).

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Foot Notes :

(1) Deuteronomy, 6, 5.
(2) Hebrews, 2, 17-18.
(3) John 17, 8 and 14.
(4) John 10, 15; cf. Matthew 11, 25-27.
(5) John 17, 21 and 26.
(6) Rom. 8, 17.
(7) Rom. 8, 28-30.
(8) 1 Cor. 13, 12; 1 John 3, 2.
(9) Luke 1, 31-34.
(10) In the history of Islam, which is so strongly opposed to the unmarried state, there is a telling example of virginity for God, against all opposition. It is the case of RABI'A of Basra, who died in Jesusalem in 801 A.D. She had a sense of utter belonging to God, and in an ascetical life reached great sanctity and love of God. She profoundly influenced the contemplative movement within Islam (Sufism), Faridu'd-Din Attar wrote of her: "Rabia, the secluded one, was clothed with the clothing of purity and was on fire with love and longing and was enamoured of the desire to approach her Lord and be consumed in His glory. She was a second Mary and a spotless woman." (John Subhan in 'Sufism, Its Saints and Shrines', Lucknow, 1960, p. 14).
(11) Number 6, 25.
(12) Isaiah, chapters 42, 49, 50 and 52.
(13) Isaiah 42, 1.
(14) A theme of all the great prophets.
(15) Luke 2, 19.

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(16) Luke 1, 46-55.
(17) Acts 1, 14.
(18) Song of Songs 2, 1
(19) Cf. 2 Cor. 3, 14.
(20) Fr. Hans Staffner S.J. : The Open Door (Asian Trading Corporation, 150 Brigade Road, Bangalore-25).
(21) Cf. Mathew 12, 28-34.

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CHAPTER 5

SOME PRACTICAL REASONS WHY WE SHOULD

———— or : The Relevance of Contemplative Prayer.

In conclusion, we may list some practical reasons which indicate the need and value of daily hour of contemplative prayer.

(a) We find that we have a number of irritating, **habitual faults and weaknesses,** which in spite of good intentions we cannot overcome (e.g. criticising impatience and loss of temper, hard words, grudges, giving in to depression). These faults disrupt our peace with others with ourselves and with God. It will be seen that a sincere effort to seek God in silence and surrender through this prayer, will gradually lessen the impact of such faults and reduce them. As it says in The Cloud of Unknowing. 'In contemplation a soul dries up the root and ground of sin that it always there, even after one's confession, and however busy one is in holy things.'(1)

(b) In the same way, such prayer will greatly help reduce tension and nervousness, especially as it affects people living in community, with the constant need for being ready, available and open to one's fellows.

The practice of this prayer will be more helpful towards building up a genuine community life

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than perhaps frequent dialogue (which too has an essential role to play). In dialogue there is a tendency to stress the importance of the issue' whereas in silent prayer, the seeking of love and peace is the issue to which all other issues are subordinated; and even when a painful decision has to be made, we are led to proceed without violence.

(c) We need a daily rhythm of sleep and wakefulness, of work and relaxation, of taking food and digestion. It seems that a daily hour for the 'healing of one's soul,' for a coming to test in a movement of love is a practical necessity for living a balanced human and Christian life.(2)

(d) There are priests and religious who feel, that they used to pray a great deal early on, e.g. at the time when their vocation became clear to them, or at the seminary or noviciate, and that gradually the daily routine of duties and spiritual exercises have crowded out sustained personal prayer. They will welcome an opportunity to return to more intensive personal prayer, at the centre of their vocation and at the centre of their lives.

In the end, when all is said and done the challenge of this prayer is that it invites us to a very personal covenant with the Lord. The daily hour of prayer is the outward sign of this covenant, in which we surrender ourselves to the Lord, and the Lord gives Himself to us. This covenant is the full-grown

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fruit of our baptismal commitment, and it is ever celebrated and renewed in the Eucharist of the New Covenant of the Lord and His People.

Foot Notes :

(1) The Cloud of Unkowing, Chapter 28.

(2) Cf. Douglas V. Streers: 'When a Hindu lives in an American Protestant home for a month and asks his host when is the time in the day that he takes for the healing of the soul, this is ecumenical crossfire that is not easily shaken off.' In the Life of Prayer as the Ground of Unity, Worship, May 1971, p. 260.

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Part Two : A METHOD OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

CHAPTER 6

THE DECISION TO PRAY DAILY, AND THE FIRST STEPS

There is only one way to become a contemplative, and that is by setting aside each day, or regularly, some time and place for prayer that is real, personal and contemplative. Without the practice of contemplative prayer, no individual and no community can be called contemplative. No amount of other prayers and occupations can make up for this need. If, then, you wish to become a contemplative, get down to making yourself available for contemplative prayer every day.

BUT HOW TO GO ABOUT IT? Here you will find some practical suggestions which have been found useful.

It is suggested that there are several 'phases' which one can go through or 'dwell in' in the course of the prayer-time. Depending on actual circumstances or personal needs, one can dwell in or stay in one phase rather than another. Or one can restrict oneself to just one phase.

For a start, it may be good to spend the hour for some days quietly seeking an awareness of the Lord's Presence; and then, by way of exercise, go through the phases, taking one a day. After this, one should be guided each day by one's needs. From the start, keep in mind what is said in the last paragraphs of this paper under the heading: 'It matters how you live.'

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Twelve Phases are listed here. Phases 1-3 (Relaxation and Silence; Faith Awareness of His Presence; Longing Love) are concerned with seeking Him, reaching out to Him.

Phases 4-7 (Surrender; Acceptance; Forgiving from the Heart; Repentance) are concerned with a purification of heart and mind which must become free and transparent to Him.

Phases 8-11 (Asking in Faith; Contemplation; Receiving; Thanksgiving and Praise) are concerned with receiving (from) Him and loving Him.

Phase 12 (Intercession) comes at the end: 'all these things shall be added unto you'.(1)

But keep in mind that in this prayer you will be involved in a most personal way; that you will learn to involve your deepest and truest self; that the Spirit of God breathes as and when He wills; that this prayer will make you a pilgrim of the Spirit, always on the move, always more eager to reach the Presence of the Lord; and you will realise that these suggestions are indeed only suggestions.

Footnote :

(1) Mathew 6, 33.

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CHAPTER 7

TWELVE PHASES: PRAY ACCORDING TO YOUR NEED

(1) Phase of Relaxation and Silence

This prayer involves a search for PEACE, tranquillity and serenity. We seek to meet the Lord of the SABBATH, in His place of rest, deep within us, and during an hour of rest and relaxation in his Presence, give Him the worship of our lives.

A major task, therefore, during this hour is to let tension relax, to calm down, to surrender to him in faith so that at His word the storm may cease, to accept His Will. 'Seek PEACE and pursue it'.(7) not with a violent effort, but in a gentle letting go of all tension, excitement. anxiety, worries, the heat of desire, the venom of hatred, the weighing down of self-pity.

One often meets the idea of 'concentration' in connection with this prayer. Concentration yes (or should we call it 'attention') but not as the result of a mighty and tense effort; only as a gentle letting go of things, a relaxing of our nervous grip on people and situations and the release from worry and anxiety.

While all these gently flow out of us, there remains only one thing: attention to the Lord, awareness of the Presence of Him Who is the Author and Giver of all peace and strength.

Just sit down and relax. Slowly and deliberately let all tension flow away, and gently seek an awareness of the

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immediate and personal Presence of God. There is no voilence in this movement: no suppression of moods, feelings, frustrations. Suppression implies violence and increases tension. No, just relax and let go of everything, as you enter into the awareness of God's presence.

You can relax and let go of everything, precisely BECAUSE He is present: In His presence nothing really matters: all things are in His hands. Tension, anxiety, worry, frustrations all melt away before Him as snow before the sun.

Seek peace and inner silence. Let your mind, heart, will and feelings become tranquil and serene. Let inner storms subside: obsessional thoughts, passionate drives of will and emotions. Seek peace and pursue it.(1)

Be ready, if necessary, to spend all your prayer-time like this, without any thought of result or effect or reward. Be ready thus to 'waste' your time; and make it a naked, selfless offering of time and attention for God alone.

This movement towards peace and silence opens us to an inflow of grace, it creates conditions for a genuine, true and personal love for God to be awakened in our spirit.

Note how this movement is not just a neutral, psychological event: It is a movement of surrender and acceptance of God's Will. We make it possible for our heart, will and emotions to become impregnated with God's gift of peace and with His Will to non-violent love...

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Some may feel that relaxation, coupled with quiet breathing, tends to make them fall asleep: it is as if one is tired and abandons oneself to quiet sleep. Here however we seek to become relaxed in order to be awake and alert to the Presence of God, rather like a sentry who makes himself quiet in order to listen for the presence of others. The mind, nerves and emotions are stilled so that the heart may be ready:

'My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready,
I will sing I will sing your praise.
Awake my Soul: I will awake the Dawn!(2)

(2) Phase of Faith Awareness of His Presence

Sit down quietly and open yourself entirely to an awareness of His presence. He is present to my spirit, attentive to my awareness. He dwells at the centre of my true self, at the core of my being. Now I seek an awareness of this, but one day He will give me this awareness, freely.

He is closer to my true self than I am myself.(3) He knows me better than I know myself. He loves me better than I love myself. He is 'Abba', Father, to me. I AM because HE IS.

In the mirror of created existence, I am His living image and likeness; when I know, I reflect His knowledge; when I love, I reflect His love; when I call out to Him, He hearts; when I seek His awareness, He awakens me to His presence in and through and with Jesus, He speaks

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His Word of Love : 'You are my son, you are my daughter, beloved of Me, in whom I am well pleased.' In and through and with Jesus, He pours out His Spirit, making me call out 'Abba', Father ! He fills me with thanks and praise for His wonderful presence.

(3) Phase of 'Longing Love'

'By love He can be caught and held, but by thinking never'.(4) Love for some one who is as yet absent is expressed in longing, in love-and-desire, in a longing love, Love for some one who is present is expressed in communication: receiving His loving presence, giving love from our hearts, expressing love in words, in touching, in self-giving.

So, we begin with an awareness of the emptiness of our heart. Then, in silence, we seek Him with longing, reaching out to Him. The picture is that of a person who in complete darkness reaches out to his loved one who is somewhere present, near by, within reach.

It is the heart that reaches out (hands tend to express what is in the heart); it is not the mind that can touch Him. The mind thinks and reflects about a person as absent; as soon as the person enters, the mind stops thinking about him; in stead there is a communication of presence: a giving and taking in of the reality of one another. 'He may well be loved, but not thought'.(5)

I can express my 'longing love' in two ways which go together viz.

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(a) by a slow, deep, rhythmic breathing. As I breathe in, I want to breathe in His loving presence; after holding my breath for one or two seconds, I breathe out slowly but fully all that is not Him. I can spend all my time in this way.

(b) by invoking His Name, calling on Him repeatedly, on the rhythm of my breathing. I find myself repeating the name of 'JESUS' (or of 'ABBA', my 'FATHER') three times while breathing in and three times while breathing out.

It should be noted that this is not a mechanical repetition of sounds, mantra-like, but a loving invocation of the heart; all the while we keep the attention of mind and heart as much as possible on Him.

Only JESUS should be invoked, or ABBA, our FATHER. We have been baptised in their name, and in no other.

What happens when we begin this 'JESUS' Prayer or 'FATHER' Prayer? Initially, we repeat the sounds with our lips (vocal prayer); after some time, we begin repeating the words mentally, while the lips can remain silent (mental prayer); gradually, sooner or later, we begin repeating the name in our (spiritual) heart: our heart has awakened, and has begun to pray. Or, as an ancient Eastern Christian tradition has it, the prayer has 'descended from the head into the heart'.

Once the heart has begun to pray, there will be a beginning of an inflow of grace by which we know Him in our heart.

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And so, begin, after some minutes of silence and recollection, with deep and slow breathing, then repeating His Name, invoking Him with a quiet longing and tender love, without forcing your emotions, but allowing your true feelings to surface from the depth of your being, and letting them ascend unto Him.

(4) Phase of Surrender

Spending time surrendering ourselves to Him is fulfilling His commandment : You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind. Our way of loving Him is in surrendering each and every part of our being to Him, and seeking to be loved and filled by Him. The Seventh Day (Sabbath) was instituted so that we should give adequate time to give Him our attention, love and surrender.

Before His face, aware of His presence, I surrender every aspect of my being; I return myself to Him; I seek to withdraw my possesiveness, and beg Him to possess me, to live in and through me, so that 'I live, no, not I but He lives in me.'(6) My hands and wrists and arms : my head and ears and senses and brain; my feet and legs; each and every nerve and muscle and blood-vessel and organ. May He accept all as an instrument of peace and render it a clean oblation...

I surrender my cares and worries; I grow in an awareness that if my faith and hope in Him are true, there is no ground for anxiety and tension; He takes care, and looks after His sons and daughters. So, I let go of every-

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thing that pre-occupies me, in a movement of faith and surrender. From now on I let Him lead me, step by step.

I surrender my heart, my feelings, my love. My heart does not love with its own love. 'Everyone who loves, is begotten by God and knows Him.(7) It is Jesus who through His Spirit loves His Father in 'my' breath of love. It is not I who love but He loves in me, through me...And His love is quiet, serene, ineffable and enduring.

I surrender my whole personality, and beyond feelings. I grope forward towards a gentle love; and beyond my thinking, 'towards where One waited near, Whose Presence well I knew, there were no other might appear.'(8)

(5) Phase of Acceptance

Many of our 'natural' reactions are expressions and gestures of non-acceptance, of rebellion, of running away from reality, of suppression; it is our anger flaring up; our impatience possessing us like an evil spirit: our dislikes and grudges hardening our hearts; our resentment at interference and interruption. Without always realising it, we often refuse to accept persons, events, situations, conditions, even ourselves, as God wills them for us, and as he accepts them for us. This non-acceptance of His Will in concrete circumstances is experienced in prayer as a barrier, a road-block on our way to Him. It is His Will that we accept people, circumstances, events as they actually are and occur; that we never endeavour to influence people or events by means of violence of the heart that we bring to bear on them only the power of love and forgiveness.

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of suffering, acceptance and thanksgiving. In daily life, this attitude includes: never judge, never argue, never criticise, never be violent, and try and mind your own business.

And so, in prayer, I become aware of actual barriers of non-acceptance. I look at each barrier and deliberately accept God's Will in this regard. I withdraw my self-oriented and condemnatory judgment; I withdraw my criticism. I regret my violence in thought, word and deed. I risk the leap of faith and love; when I turn my heart towards Him, He makes each and everything contribute to my true welfare.(9)

Acceptance of His Will is in fact identical with acceptance of His guidance, His Lordship, as He leads me, step by step, through the concrete circumstances of my daily life. Through His Will for me, He guides and leads me into His Kingdom. His Kingdom comes and advances where and to the extent that His Will is accepted and done.

And so I lay down my own will, and try to discern His Will. My own thoughts and plans lose their compulsion as I seek to see His plan as it unfolds and as I endeavour to follow His pattern.

(6) Phase of Forgiving from the Heart

The God whom I seek is love, full of compassion and forgiveness. Even before I repent and seek His mercy, His forgiveness is ready, waiting for me. My heavenly Father calls me to be like Him, as a true son and daughter.(11) Jesus, His beloved Son has manifested His true Sonship also

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in unreserved love and forgiveness towards those who hurt Him : 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'(11)

Few things close our hearts to God's grace and to His loving Presence as much as resentment, unforgiveness and hurt feelings. Our hearts have been created for loving, for being channels of His love from deep within our being. But resentment and unforgiveness block and poison our hearts. 'Harden not your hearts...'(12)

The first step is the decision to forgive the one who has hurt us, a decision made by an act of the will. But more is needed. Our heart needs to be cleansed of bitterness and healed of hurt and pain, so that we can remember what has happened with undisturbed inner peace.

The best way to come to this deeper cleansing and healing is, as we sit before the Lord, to close our eyes, and recall the memory: re-entering the situation by visualising the place and person(s) at that time. Next, just imagine Jesus Himself coming to you there, at that time. Actually, He was there, but you did not notice Him then. What would He do for me? He would surely love me, and also ask me to forgive the other person. So then, address that person directly, repeating the words: 'In Jesus' Name, I forgive you from my heart'.

Continue to pray like this, until you can 'see' the Lord loving that person, and you are able to love and accept the person also.

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When there is a deep hurt, you may need all the time of prayer working on this one memory-relationship. But it is worth giving all the time. At another time, you may make a list of say three to eight persons whom from childhood onwards you may have disliked. Then, beginning with the first, pray as above, praying for each one on the list. This will open the inner heart to the grace of contemplative prayer.

(7) Phase of Repentance and Forgiveness

(a) When we enter this prayer, we may be oppressed by a sense of sin and falling. It may be a general sense of sin and unworthiness, or it may be due to a sorry state we got into only just now. We must face this barrier in a spirit of genuine repentance and true humility. We confess our sins, our failing, and we beg His forgiveness, and we thank Him most humbly for hearing our prayer. Then we face God as we are: sinful, spiritually handicapped and disabled in many ways, chronic patients. And we accept these handicaps and disabilities because He accepts us as we are, and because He loves us as we are.

We are not permitted to nurse a sense of guilt; we must fully and completely accept and embrace His forgiveness and love. Guilt feeling and inferiority feeling before God are expressions of selfishness, of self-centredness : we give greater importance to our little sinful self than to His immense and never-ending love. We must surrender our guilt and our inferiority to Him; His goodness is greater than our badness. We must accept His joy in loving and

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forgiving us. It is a healing grace to surrender our sinfulness to His mercy.

We may want to spend quite some time in letting all this sink into our consciousness.

(b) When unable to pray for no precise reason except a sense of unease and unworthiness. The Cloud of Unknowing may help us :

'Since all evil is summed up in sin, considered casually or essentially, when we pray with intention for the removing of evil, we should neither say, think or mean any more than this little word 'sin'...You should fill your spirit with the inner meaning of the single word 'sin', without analysing what kind it is, venial or mortal, or pride, anger, envy, avarice, sloth, gluttony or lust. What does it matter to contemplatives what sort of a sin it is, or how great? For when they are engaged in contemplation, they think all sins alike are great in themselves, when the smallest sin separates them from God, and prevents spiritual peace.

Feel sin in its totality—as alump—without specifying any particular part, and that all of it is you. And then cry ceaselessly in your spirit this one thing: 'Sin! Sin! Sin! Help! Help! Help!' This spiritual cry is better learned from God by experience than from any man by word. It is best when it is entirely spiritual, unpremeditated and unuttered. On occasion perhaps the overfull heart will burst out into words, because body and soul alike are filled with sorrow and the burden of sin.'([13])

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One may also repeatedly cry out 'Lord, have mercy!' or 'Jesus, forgive me my sins!' until He gives the grace of compunction and melts the lump of sin within us.

(8) Phase of Asking in Faith

Prayer is not something we do on our own. When we take one step towards Him, He moves towards us. There are two spiritual steps which hasten His coming in grace:

(1) First, the step of accepting (at a definite time and place) Jesus as your **personal** Lord and Saviour. This involves an acceptance of Him and yielding to Him at a very deep and personal level. He always responds to this acceptance, which enables Him to begin to manifest to you His Lordship and saving power. This act of acceptance seems deceptively simple, and perhaps superflous, but is surprising on its results. As some one said, "I did not know that you could ask Jesus to come into your life and take it over, and that He would really do so!" Mary had taken this step, accepting God as her own Lord and becoming His servant, and singing His praises, "My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, My Saviour." 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.'([14])

(2) Secondly, the step of praying to be baptised in the Holy Spirit' which is the beginning of a release into our conscious awareness of the graces of the Holy Spirit, dwelling within us through the Sacraments. It is the step which for many opens the way to **infused** contemplative prayer, and for others renews, strengthens and develops it. It is the beginning of a new life in the Spirit, in which knowledge

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and love of God becomes a personally experienced reality. It is meant to lead on to much more, such as a radical insertion into the mystery of the Body of Christ and a more powerful witness to the Gospel of Jesus.

And all my prayer is that in this silence He may pour out His Spirit, and begin to live and reign in me...I surrender myself to Jesus, my Saviour, and accept Him as my Lord. He has prayed and suffered to free me and claim me as His own: Take me and all I have, and do with me whatever You will. Send me where You will. Use me as You will. I surrender myself and all I possess absolutely and entirely, unconditionally and forever, to your control.

This phase can grow into an ardent and insistent supplication for the Holy Spirit, for His outpouring, for His gifts, for an overwhelming sense of His Presence and peace in the core of my being.

'Come, holy Spirit, fill my heart, now surrendered to Jesus, my Saviour, my Lord. And enkindle in me the fire of divine love. Fill me with the glorious presence of my Risen Lord, so that I may no longer love, but He lives in me.'([15])

And the supplication always ends in faith that he has already heard my prayer.([16])

(9) Phase of Contemplation

By now I have put away all obstacles in my heart, all thinking in my mind, all wavering in my will: Now 'Him I covet, Him I seek and nothing but Him.'([17])

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'It is enough that I should feel moved lovingly by I know not what, and that in this inward urge I have no real thought for anything less than God, and that my desire is steadily and simply turned towards Him.'(18)

'I lift up my heart to God with humble love. And I really mean God Himself who created me, and bought me and graciously calls me—and not what I get out of Him. Indeed, I hate to think of anything but God himself, so that nothing occupies my mind or will but only God... I think no other thought of him, apart from my awareness of him darkly but gloriously present. It all depends on my desire: a naked intention directed to God, and himself alone.'(19)

I turn myself entirely to His Presence. I steadily look at Him. His presence becomes more real to me. He holds my inward sight. My glance simply and lovingly rest on him. My prayer is nothing but a loving awareness of Him. 'I look because I love; I look in order to love, and my love is fed and influenced by looking... (20)

'With nobody in sight, when all my house was hushed, concealed from other eyes, when all my house at length in silence slept'(21) I reach out to God in love. While I am quiet and exist in a calm and simple awareness of His presence, my heart gropes towards Him and opens to receive His Love. It is a prayer which is wordless fed by a quiet ardour. 'By love He can be caught and held, but by thinking never.'(22) There is a darkness which thought and clear knowledge cannot bridge, but only longing love

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'Beat away at this cloud of unknowing between you and God with that sharp dart of longing love.'([23])

Upon that lucky night
in secrecy, inscrutable to sight.
I went without discerning
and with no other light
except for that which in my heart was burning.
It lit and led me through
more certain than the light of noonday clear
to where One waited near
whose presence well I knew
there were no other presence might appear.([24])

This phase may well be sustained by a repetition prayer, carried on a quiet rhythm of breathing.

(10) Phase of Receiving

God always responds. He cannot refuse a seeking in faith and love. 'Seek and you will always find' becomes 'Seek and you will always be found.' He seeks us before we seek Him, while we seek Him and after we have sought Him. 'I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you! It is the Lord who speaks.([25])

He responds: He turns to me. He seeks me. He is anxious to invade my spirit. He wants that His Spirit possess me. I bask in the warmth of His love. I feel His gaze upon me. Jesus, my Lord, is eager to possess my heart with which to love His Father, and with which to radiate His love.

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'Anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love Him and show myself to him...and we shall come and make our home with him.' It is the Lord who speaks.([26])

'We ourselves have known and put our faith in God's love towards ourselves. God is love And anyone who lives in love, lives in God, and God lives in him.'([27])

He fills us with His presence, with His Spirit. We may discern Him only in faith, or, through His grace, in experience.

His presence brings a deep spiritual peace, a share in His 'sabbath' Rest, a greater serenity, ability to accept and to suffer, a lifting of despair, a welling up of joy and love, a floodlight, a strong desire to praise and thank Him.

Or if such be His Will, it brings power to serve Him and proclaim Him to bear witness to His kingdom, to bring healing in His name, to bring peace and unity to men of goodwill.

(11) Phase of Praise and Thanksgiving

Jesus invariably thanked and praised His Father and taught His disciples to do the same.

The Eucharistic Prayer is such a Prayer of Praise, Thanksgiving and Intercession. When He has made known His presence, or touched us with His Spirit, filled us with His grace and peace, we shall spontaneously thank and praise Him.

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May be the time will come, when we shall thank Him too when we share in Jesus' loneliness and suffering simply because His Will is being done in us...

(12) Phase of Intercession

There is need for intercession. Jesus continues to save us through His uninterrupted intercession.([28]) In some way, He also needs to use our hearts for this intercession. True, we seek the Giver rather than the gift, but the Giver seeks to save His people. Through His Spirit in us He is concerned for all those who should be His people; in us He wants to intercede and suffer.

We must plead and never lose heart,([29]) with simple and expectant faith. His promise is there: Ask and you will always receive.([30]) We must learn to pray with faith that He has already given what we ask for, as the Lord has urged us to pray: Everything you ask and pray for, believe that you have it already and it will be yours.([31])

We pray according to His Will([32]) for His Kingdom in ourselves and in others. Lord, teach me how to pray; glorify your Name; your Kingdom come; your will be done in my life and the life of others; Lord, grant your peace to...; Help...in his need. Lord make your love known to...

Often one may wish to 'intercede' for a while at the end of prayer.

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Foot Noes :

(1) Ps. 33, 14.
(2) Psalms 56 and 107.
(3) The 'intimior intimio meo' of St. Augustine.
(4) The Cloud of Unknowing; a book on contemplation, written about 1350 by an unknown English author. Translated into modern English by Clifton Wolters, Penguin Classics, 1961, Ch. 6.
(5) Gal. 2, 20.
(6) 1 John 4, 7.
(7) Poems by St. John of the Cross, translated by Roy Campbell (Penguin 1960) p. 27.
(8) Rom 8, 28.
(9) Mathew 5, 44; 45; 48.
(10) Luke 23, 34.
(11) Psalm 94, 8.
(12) The Cloud, chapters 39 and 40.
(13) Revelations 3, 20.
(14) Gal. 2, 20.
(15) Mark 11, 24.
(16) The Cloud, Ch. 7.
(17) The Cloud, Ch. 34.
(18) Cf. The Cloud, Ch. 3 and 7.
(19) Dom Vitalis Lehodey, OCR. The Ways of Mental Prayer, Gill, Dublin, 1960, Pt. II, Ch. IX, Para 2.
(20) John of the Cross, o.c. p. 27.
(21) The Cloud, Chapter 6.
(22) The Cloud, Chapter 12.
(23) John of the Cross, o.c. p. 27.
(24) Jeremiah 31, 3.
(25) John 14, 21 and 23.

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(26) 1 John 4, 16.
(27) Hebrews 7, 25. Cf. Rom. 8, 34 and 1 John 2, 1.
(28) Luke 18, 1.
(29) Luke 11, 10.
(30) Mark 11, 24. Cf. 1 John 5, 14/15 and James I, 5-6.
(31) 1 John 5, 14-15.

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CHAPTER 8

SOME PRACTICAL POINTS HOW TO DEAL WITH DISTRACTIONS

Wandering thoughts (distractions) often are a problem. We may be unable to relax, to let tensions go and surrender. Or we may be just very tired physically and mentally. The first thing to do is to accept fully this weakness and to remember that this prayer is for Him and for no advantage of our own : be ready to waste this part of your time as an 'immolation' poured out for Him. In one way, a sense of failure belongs to the essence of prayer because through it we learn to become truly disinterested; we seek His presence and love Him even when His face is hidden, when His presence is not discerned.

This is true of a more general sense of failure : 'Imperfection and even sins are such a help to that humility which is the condition of prayer, that they seem almost a help rather than a hindrance. To feel utterly crushed and annihilated, incapable of any good, wholly dependent on God's undeserved and infinite mercy, is the best and only preparation for prayer. It means an entire confidence and exultation in being nothing because God is all, which brings the only peace which is true peace.(1)

Here are two specific ways of minimising distractions and of keeping our awareness focussed on His presence to the greatest possible extent.(2)

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(1) Rhythmic Breathing

Tension, worry, excitement all lead to short and shallow breathing. On the other hand if we make our breathing more deliberate, more slow and more regular (rhythmic), tension ebbs away and we become more relaxed and have a greater sense of peace and serenity.

During this prayer, therefore, we should try to breathe in (and out) slowly, deeply and deliberately, to the rhythm of our pulse or heart-beat. More precisely, breathe in through the nose, counting mentally 1, 2, 3, 4, 5...up to about 6 to about the speed of your hear-beat hold the breath a little (or some counts) and then breathe out in the same way in a controlled and slow manner. At the end of the exhalation pause a while (for some counts). You can practice this rhythmic breathing some other time also, e.g., when walking or sitting quietly or lying down.

At first, it needs conscious attention and control, but gradually, it will become habitual and you will do it without thinking.

(2) Repetition Prayers

It is very helpful when a suitable repetition prayer (or 'ejaculatory' prayer) is carried on our quiet and rhythmic breathing. One can speak the words (with the lips, or better, mentally) either while breathing in or breathing out, or both. In view of the rhythmic breathing, the prayer should have a certain cadence or rhythm, to let it be carried on the rhythm of the breathing.

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The best known example is the Jesus Prayer : the text consists either in a repetition of the holy name of **Jesus :** Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...or in the words: 'Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' It is carried rhythmically on one's quiet breathing, again and again and again, while one's awareness remains on the Saviour.([3])

When one is physically or mentally too weary to pray otherwise, one can use the Rosary prayer, quietly telling the beads, carrying the Aves gently and rhythmically on one's breathing and dwelling with love on some mystery of faith. One could say ten to fifteen such decades in an hour.

During the first few months, after I had begun this hour of prayer, (to avoid distractions) I used to keep my eyes open and fixed throughout on an object ahead (e.g. a crucifix; the tabernacle) or on a point. I did not even look at my watch because when the eyes shift, my attention, focussed on Him, is also interrupted.

After some months I was satisfied with keeping my eyes closed throughout. To have a sense of the passage of time, I use the Rosary beads, slipping the beads through my fingers on the rhythm of my breathing. Four times round a Rosary and I am close to the end of the hour. At this point I may check the time on my watch.

SOME PRACTICAL POINTS

Where to Pray. I would say, in a place where one is completely private and alone; where one is unlikely to be disturbed; where there is not too much noise. Jesus says,

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'When you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shult the door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place !(4) and He Himself 'would always go off to some place where He could be alone and pray.'(5) There is comfort in the fact that He did not always succeed !(6) Being together with other in the same place or room does not seem advisable, as the very awareness of other person's presence often is a powerful psychological distraction and a hindrance to complete relaxation.

Ideally, the best place is before the Blessed Sacrament, the Sacrament of His Presence among us, and this is what Father Voillaume advocates for the followers of Charles de Foucauld. But it is a fact of experience that in many churches and chapels there is too much distraction and noise.

Cardinal Lercaro sums it up, "If possible, in church or in one's room; preferably the latter, if in church one is likely to be called upon to perform the duties of one's ministry, or disturbed for some other reason. Somewhere out of doors would do — but in general, the place to be chosen is that where there is least likelihood of meeting with distractions or interruptions.(7)

How Long to Pray. One thinks of **one full hour daily.** This is the traditional time fixed for 'mental' prayer in most religious rules. St. Peter of Alcantara says, 'When the time is too short, it is passed in unloading the imagination and in bringing the heart under control; just at the moment when we are ready and ought to be beginning the exercise, we stop it.'(8) It is a sobering thought that one full

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hour a day represents just about 4% of all the time we live.

It would seem that the more active and distracting our daily life is, the more need there is of a full hour of 'relaxing, coming to rest in God.' We need the steadying impact of this daily 'exercise' on our nerves and emotions. We also need the daily 'healing' of soul' and 'opening to the Spirit' in quiet and silence if we lead a busy life. In this way, through daily, silent prayer, God changes us and renews us more thoroughly than through other beneficial activities.

In view of all this, one would not advocate the practice of having two separate periods of thirty minutes each, instead of one full hour at one time. At first, one full hour seems dreadfully long, and the first weeks or months perseverance may be an agonising effort. But gradually, we get used to this length and attuned to its spirit of quiet leisure; spent with and for God.

But make the effort: 'Work hard at it, therefore, and with all speed; hammer away at this cloud of unknowing —and take your rest later! It is hard work and no mistake, for the would-be contemplative; very hard work indeed, unless it is made easier by special grace of God, or by the fact that one has got used to it over a long period.'(9)

When to pray. The actual time must to some extent depend on what is possible within the framework of one's work and commitments. Some like the early morning: 'In the early morning while it was still dark, Jesus arose and

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went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.'([10]) The morning quiet may be rewarding if one has succeeded in being physically and mentally fully awake (bath, fresh air!). Others prefer the quiet evening before sleep; at this time it is easier to relax and one joins in 'an hour of watch and vigil' with Christ.

Many people have no choice and have to take any opportunity of a whole hour free. It may mean giving up certain things we like to do... It has been found possible to have one's quiet prayer even in a long-distance bus, on a railway station...

Those living in community and bound to mental prayer by religious rule should perhaps discuss the time problem together or with the superior, and see from time to time when each can best engage in this prayer.

It seems worth nothing that this prayer fulfills the obligation of mental prayer of meditation with religious and others have. Does this mean that one no longer meditates? As a special exercise meditation may be dropped, but as such it never disappears. The one who seeks God in contemplative prayer tends to read and hear the reading from Scriptures with greater interest: the liturgy and other spiritual reading make one reflect; one continues to ponder the mysteries and the ways of God.

Posture During Prayer. This is an important point as bodily posture has a definite influence on our ability to relax and remain undistracted. The body should be relaxed but attentive; one's posture should be comfortable but not

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a source of strain or tension. It is said that there is least strain when one's back is straight. In a veritical position, one holds back and head straight when there is a balance like someone balancing a load on the head.

Traditionally, there is a preference for kneeling (straight). Sitting may be more relaxing (again straight); a low stool (about 10 inches high) without back may be useful. Those who are accustomed to squatting on the floor will find this position more restful, again if the back is held straight.

Foot Notes :

(1) Dom John Chapman, Spiritual Letters, (Sheed & Ward, London), p. 293.

(2) 'Distractions are of two kinds (a) the ordinary distractions such as one has in meditations which take one right away; and (b) the harmless wandering of the imagination alone, while the intellect is (to all appearance) idle and empty, and the will is fixed on God. These are quite harmless. When these latter distractions remain all the time, the prayer is just as good. Often much better. The will remains united; yet we feel utterly dissatisfied and humbled.' Dom John Chapman, o. c. p. 290.

Here we are especially concerned with the 'harmless' wandering imagination while our heart and will reach out to God and are fixed on him. The imagination here is like one's pet god in a room: we like it to sit down quietly for a while, but it keeps on wandering

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a little. The two aids (rhythmic breathing and repetition prayers) are like two dog-chains which keep the imagination from wandering too much and too far !

(3) The Jesus Prayer is described in detail in 'The Way of the Pilgrim' tr...from the Russian by R. M. French, Seabury Press, New York, 1970. Jean Gouillard also describes it in an appendix to Fr. Dechanet's book Christian Yoga under the title: A note on the Prayer of the Heart. Swami Abhishiktananda, in his book on Prayer (I.S.P.C.K., Delhi, 1972) discusses the Jesus Prayer in the chapter on The Prayer of the Name and goes on to suggest our Lord's own prayer of "Abba ! Father ! as possibly the best way of entering into the life of the most Holy Trinity. It may be noted that the Jesus Prayer has a scope and application which is far beyond our present concern (an hour of contemplative prayer a day) and looks forward towards a never-ceasing prayer of union with God.

(4) Mathew 6, 6 (Jerusalem Bible).

(5) Luke 5, 16 (Jerusalem Bible).

(6) Mark 6, 30 ff.

(7) Cardinal Lercaro, Methods of Mental Prayer, London, Burns & Oates, 1957, p. 207.

(8) Cardinal Lercaro, o. c. p. 206.

(9) The Cloud of Unknowing Chapter 25.

(10) Mark I, 35.

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CHAPTER 9

THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFE

——————————or : It Matters How You Live.

The hour of silent prayer must be important to you in relation to your whole life as a christian, as a religious or as a priest. Most religious experienced their original call as a call to a life of surrender to God and of dedication to His service, but with the addition that God seemed to promise a life in which they would experience, in a personal way, knowledge of Him and of His love.

This hour of contemplative prayer is meant to lead you to a fulfilment of this promise.
But your life must be ready for this grace in a two-fold way, viz. :

(1) Non-Violence of Heart and Mind

We must be firmly committed to LIVE a peaceful life. This is both a condition for and a fruit of this prayer. Our peace may be disturbed by all seven capital sins, those vicious tendencies that can hold us in their grip : pride, jealousy, anger, gluttony, lust, laziness and greed. Yet the main disturber of our peace seems to be the passion of anger.

This, at least has been suggested by Evagrius of Pontus (345-399).(1) Any yielding to anger (which includes rancour, suspicion, antipathies, bitterness, peevishness,

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touchiness) is bound to be paid for at the time of prayer. Prayer is a useful barometer, indicating unabashedly our calm and storms. 'Prayer is the off-shoot of gentleness and the absence of anger' (Evagrius). At the root of anger lies a desire for and attachment to wordly things and values: 'What in fact would a man have to get angry about if he cared nothing for food, wealth, human prestige and so on.' (Evagrius)

It is clear that we must be whole-heartedly committed to the mind of Jesus as witnessed to by His indwelling Spirit, as revealed in the Gospels, and as proclaimed in the Sermon of the Mount: no violence, no hatred, no evil desire, no revenge, no judging, but gentleness, compassion, willingness to give and to share, an outgoing love and forgiveness for those who harm us.

We must endeavour to express our continued surrender by moving away from violence to non-violent and peaceful ways, from any kind of falsehood to utter truthfulness and inner harmony, from self-assertion to great sensitivity to the needs, rights and feelings of others, from self-indulgence to an instinct for purity of heart and mind, from possessiveness and greed to give and share and a preference for soberness.

We must welcome with all our heart the fruits of the Holy Spirit; true love, joy in the Spirit, peace in our heart. patience in our manner, kindness towards all, goodness in our intentions, trustfulness in our dealings, gentleness in inward and outward bearing and self-control of heart and mind.

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All this becomes possible to the extent that we open our heart and life to the Spirit of Jesus. And human nature being what it is, it also involves continual return to repentance.

I have also found that it is necessary that we keep our heart and mind free for this prayer, through a simple and sober life-style, and through avoiding escapist habits such as compulsive reading of stories, watching T.V. or films. If we keep our heart and mind free for Him, we can surely enjoy good gifts of reading and watching TV occasionally, but true contemplative prayer is incompatible with escapist habits which overload the mind and bind the heart.

(2) Nourishing A Desire For God

You must nourish within yourself continually a desire for God, for the fulfilment of the promise He held out from the beginning.

You may not have the same intensity of feeling but you should at least sympathise with the person who wrote as follows about this attraction to God.

'If it happens that this attraction that you feel in reading or hearing about this matter (is contemplative love of God) is of itself so overwhelming that it goes to bed with you, gets up with you in the morning, accompanies you all day in all you do, separates you from normal daily exercises by inserting itself between your prayers and you; if it is associated with and follows your desire to the extent that it seems to be just the one desire, or you scarcely

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know what it is that alters your outlook and brings a cheerful smile to your lips; if, whilst it lasts, everything is a consolation and nothing can upset you; if you would run a thousand miles to have speech with some one whom you know has truly felt as you do; if, when you get there, you have nothing to say, no matter who speaks to you, since you do not wish to speak except about that one thing; if your words are few, but full of unction and fire; if one brief word of yours holds a world full of wisdom but seems mere foolishness to those who have not passed beyond reason; if your silence is peaceful, your speech edifying, your prayer secret, your pride proper, your behaviour modest, your laughter very soft; if your delight is that of a child at play; if you love to be alone and sit apart because you feel that others would hinder you, unless they did what you are doing; if you do not wish to read or listen to reading unless it be about this one thing; then indeed ...' there is evidence that you are drawn to true contemplative prayer which is beyond words and thought.(2)

We discern a similar intense desire for God in the words of the hymn, Jesu, dulcis memoria:

Jesus, Just to think of you fills my heart with joy but there is no happiness to compare with the joy your sweet presence.

More attractive than any melody
more exciting than any news,
more pleasant than any thought are You Jesus, Son of God.

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Jesus: You are the hope of repentant sinner
You are kind to those who ask your help
You are good to those who seek you
but who shall say what You are to those who find You!

No words can describe, no book can explain, and if you know from experience, you can only believe what it means to love Jesus.

When You visit my heart, it is bathed in the light of truth, the world loses all its attraction and an inner love is burning.

Those who have tasted You, hunger for more
those who have drunk, are thirsty for more
but only those who love You, Jesus, are able to long for You.

Jesus, be my joy now as You will be my reward,
May your glory dwell in me, for ever and always.
Amen.

There are two ways in which we can feed and strengthen this attraction and desire for God:

One way is 'Lectio Divina': this is a kind of meditative **spiritual reading,** the reading of texts which we feel, draw us to God and to prayer; the kind of texts which at times you want to read only in small parts because even in small sections they fill your mind and heart with love of and desire for God.

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Such reading tends to keep your mind in devout meditation, leading to contemplation. 'Therefore, if you burn with desire for contemplation, apply yourself to devout and continual meditations; it is the infallible way to succeed'.(3)

'A work impregnated with the divine quality is the only kind a soul should consider. Needless to say, holy Scripture is the first and purest source of all. And a truly recollected reading is both pleasing to God and often instrumental in bringing Him back. Now in the state of quietitude the soul receives many lights, enabling it to discover new shadings and meanings that were hidden before; these seem to appear effortlessly, and as a kind of enlightenment that is sweet yet substantial enough to be experienced. The soul realises then, that this enlightening Presence is the Holy Ghost. God's gift is a higher, loving knowledge of Himself, and increase of faith in His Sacred Scriptures'.(4)

The other way is to pray for the gift of prayer : 'Lord. teach me how to pray, how to know and love You in silent prayer; Lord, pour Your Spirit in me in all His fullness; Lord, let me be possessed by Your Spirit, so that you may reign in me and through me....'

It is clear from the Gospel that (a) we must ask for the gift of the Spirit, with expectant faith; and (b) this prayer will be heard.(5)

A song of devotion should not be lightly sung,

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Your word should not be lightly given, but once given kept.

This prayer should not be lightly started.

Start only when you are ready, and then, never look back.

The Lord loves you and needs you.

He is waiting for an opportunity to enter your life.

Once you have began praying you will never be the same.

He will make use of you.

It will be the greatest thing in your life.

May He be praised : alleluia !

Foot Notes :

(1) Sursum Corda, February 1971, p. 329 ff.

(2) A Letter of Private Direction, by the author of The Cloud of Unknowing (cf. 9 ab.) London, Burns & Oates, p. 67-68.

(3) Cardinal Lercaro, o. c. p. 252, quoting Fr. Thomas of Jesus on acquired contemplation.

(4) Dom G. Belorgey, O.C.S.O. The Practice of Mental Prayer, Mercier Press, Cork 1951, p. 144-145.

(5) Luke 11, 13.

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CHAPTER 10
LEARN BY DOING

INITIATION SCHEDULE FOR AN EIGHT DAYS' RETREAT

Spend each day a full-hour in this silent prayer, or, if you feel drawn to it, twice a full hour (e.g. morning and evening).

Find a place where you can sit (with your back straight) undisturbed; a place which invited you to prayer, e.g. your own room, a chapel, on the roof, in the garden)

FIRST DAY : 'Seek Me With All Your Heart'

Spend the hour more or less as follows :

(1) **Relaxation and Silence :** First begin deep, slow breathing, and give attention to your own physical reality; then, with eyes closed, listen to all the sounds that you can hear, near and far, and try to identify the sounds; finally, turn your attention to your self, your spiritual heart, the centre of your being. (5 to 10 minutes)

(2) Make an **act of faith** in His real and living presence. Try to visualise Him (before you; or, with you; or, within you), and relate to Him (e.g. a dialogue of speaking and listening). (The imagination — visualising — is a powerful faculty for actualising our faith) (say, 10 mintes)

(3) Allow your sins and failings to come to your mind. He is holy. Confess each sin to Him, asking His

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pardon and receiving it with a humble and grateful heart. (say, 10 minutes)

(4) Open your heart in hope and expectation. I have met a house-wife who one rising each morning prepares for her hour of prayer with the thought, 'I'm going to meet my Lord'. If you do not expect any grace from Him in this hour, He may not be able to give you anything. There are some who approach this daily hour of prayer as a routine, going through the motions, as if going to the dining room, saying grace, sitting down, chatting at table; then, rising with grace and leaving — all this while there was no food on the table! And thinking that this is normal! No, open your heart in expectation : He has prepared a banquet for you. (10 minutes)

(5) Reach out to Him with love and desire, a longing love : 'by love He may be caught and held, but by thinking never'(1) Allow the deepest longings of your heart to come to the surface — and in faith, seek Him for all that you need. (All the remaining time)

SECOND DAY : Seeking Him Invoking His Name

Once you sit quietly, and have become attentive, go through yesterday's acts of faith, contrition, hope and love.

Then, begin to express your longing love through your breathing with the invocation of His Name.
(as in Phase 3)

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When you begin with this, first focus your attention on your spiritual heart, where He is present. Then begin repeating His Name, and try to keep your attention (a) on His Name, and (b) in your heart. Whenever your mind has wandered, gently lead it back.

THIRD DAY : Surrender

As you begin to focus your attention on Him, and become aware of His presence, consciously, explicitely (in words), deliberately surrender your whole being and every part of your being, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual in to His hands.

The Lord does not ask us to renounce what we are or what we have; He only asks that we should entrust all we have and are into His hands and into His loving care; that we live in total trust and in pure faith in Hom. Surrendering is our way of loving and of accepting His love. Hearts and lives that are surrendered become channels of His love, peace and presence. (Cf. Phase 4)

FOURTH DAY : Acceptance

As you begin to turn your attention to Him and reaching out to Him, deliberately allow your negative feelings, your dislikes, to come to your mind, especially situations, people's ways, which irritate and annoy you, the things you tend to criticise and grumble about : weather, food, servants, ill-health, society, language and habits of people.

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'Every event is adorable' — everything is in His hands, for those who love Him. He accepts every event and loves me through everything that happens... I repent of my own inner violence and come to a deep acceptance of His concrete will for me in every circumstance. Through this faith-acceptance, He can make me an instrument of change for the better, where needed and where possible. (Cf. Phase 5)

FIFTH DAY : Forgiving and Repentance

On this day, I would suggest two separate hours on themes which though distinct, yet cannot be separated.

(1) **Forgiving Everyone From the Heart**

After entering into prayer, we seek purification and healing of our heart as in Phase 6.

(2) **Repentance and Receiving Forgiveness**

Similarly, we seek purification and healing of heart through recalling our sins, confessing them to the Lord and receiving His forgiveness in faith (as in Phase 7)

In His holy presence, ask Him to reveal your sins and failings to you; then, confess and seek His mercy. Our sorrow is that our sins have kept our hearts away from Him and have made us blind : 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me ! I once was lost but now am found; was blind but now I see !'

SIXTH DAY : Asking in Faith

'All life, all holiness, comes from You, Father, through Your Son Jesus Christ, Our Lord,

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by the working of the Holy Spirit!' (3rd Eucharistic Prayer)

In this hour we seek His presence in our hearts through the working of the holy Spirit. We come to JESUS in personal faith, and in His Name we ask for our heart to be filled. Will not my heavenly Father give His Holy Spirit when I ask Him?([2]) (Cf. Phase 8)

SEVENTH DAY : Contemplation

Receiving His Presence and becoming aware of Him in our heart (Cf. Phase 9) As we grow in the grace of this Phase, we begin to recognise His presence in our hearts, which gradually will fill our whole being, as we become more and more transparent to His presence. He dwells in me (in my heart) and I dwell in Him (in His Heart)([3]) In this way I become one with Him, while remaining distinct. My one desire is to be in His perfect Will, and to do it every moment.

EIGHT DAY : 'Holding Him and not Letting Him Go'

In this hour of prayer, turn your attention to Him within you as usual. Then, let the repeating of His Name be a constant expression of your love : give love and receive love; give praise and thanksgiving; ask Him to speak to your heart and listen to what He is saying to you this hour — and then respond to His words.

On this last day, you have to decide to 'hold' Him and never to let Him go. In practice this means a personal

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decision to give Him an hour of your time each and every day.

This hour I give to Him whatever it may cost me;
This giving of my time is an offering of love to Him, expressing the devotion of my heart;
I will give Him this hour daily
in times of joy and sorrow, of consolation and dryness;
This hour is for Him alone, and not for what I shall get out of it; it expresses by self-gift to Him who is my everything.

Footnotes :

(1) The Cloud, Chapter 6.

(2) Luke 11, 13.

(3) Cf. John 6, 58 and John 17, 26.

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" There is only one way to become a contemplative, and that is by setting aside each day some time and place for prayer that is real, personal and contemplative. "

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